

Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES):
Conference on "Cross-Border Education and Development Co-operation"

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Dear conference participants, ladies and gentlemen,

In a world of increasing interdependence, the solution of urging development problems as defined by the Millennium Development Goals is of vital interest to Germany and its international partner countries. Looking at the UN Millennium Development Goals as a kind of internationally approved road map towards sustainable development, it is obvious that to reach each of these goals, academically trained experts are needed. Social progress, good governance, protection of natural resources, better health, nutrition and primary education cannot be achieved without teachers, doctors, economists, biologists and, last but not least, researchers who deal with the conditions and objectives of development at national, regional and global levels.

The vision is that higher education and research – and the University as the institution which combines both under its roof – play the role of a driving force for development by providing future experts and leaders with the necessary skills to act as „agents of change“.

One strong tool to get closer to this vision, and the reason why we met during the last two days, is Cross-Border Education. As Dr Hahn and Dr Alexander mentioned just now, it could be an instrument against the "globalisation apartheid". Cross-Border Education is a given fact and will certainly increase in the coming years. But we all know – and again could see during this conference – that it takes places in a highly complex environment. Hence, there is a high diversity of approaches.

This conference gave you a platform to discuss on the one hand the more technical issues of Cross-Border Education, like curriculum development and joint degrees, credit transfer, blended learning aspects and questions of quality assurance and accreditation. On the other hand, today's input statement of Dr Neville Alexander as well as the following discussion brought up questions about the broader framework of Cross-Border Education. What kind of institutional framework does Cross-Border Education need to unfold its full impact on the concerned societies? And in which way does Cross-Border Education contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals?

In this context, we could see that new modes of interaction are applied. The trend is going more and more from bilateral to multilateral relationships and additionally to regional South-South co-operation networks as a response to globalisation. Having said that, one needs to concede that there is nothing like "the South" in higher education development. The increasingly heterogeneous scenarios will have to be reflected in future policies and programmes. Some developing countries have become global players on the international higher education market and do not need any support from outside. Some

countries invest their own funds to buy consultancy and other services to develop their higher education system. The trend “from aid to trade”, from development co-operation to competition is changing the modalities of North-South co-operation and leads to new approaches (South-North, South-South).

In the daily battle of “McDonaldisation” against cultural identity it was not surprising to see that one of the main questions raised during these two days was the question how to consider and deal with cultural diversity in the process of Cross-Border Education (e.g. in terms of language: anglophonisation vs. indigenous languages or in terms of curricula: flexibility with regards to local needs and target groups vs. mainstreaming). Does Cross-Border Education lead to a “one size fits all”-mentality or can we achieve a sound balance between cultural diversity and internationalisation?

To get the driving force of Cross-Border Education started and to keep it going, certain basic conditions must be fulfilled: An academic élite which is internationally linked and at the same time locally committed as you are; Governments, on the other hand, which are not primarily concerned with the political control of higher education institutions but rather with the liberation of their creative potential and an output-orientated allocation of infrastructure and material incentives; an international academic community which considers development as a global challenge and as an international scientific „joint venture”.

The discussions yesterday and today mainly brought up four important areas in which we should focus working on as well as trying to spread food for thought for policy makers and stakeholders:

- common data and reporting systems
- co-ordinated policies, strategies and programmes
- reduction of mobility barriers
- regional qualification frameworks

Like any other development effort, in order to achieve local ownership and sustainability (to mention but two of the catchwords) higher education policies cannot be imported from outside. If we assume that efficient education systems are demand-driven and output-orientated, the demand has to be defined and the output to be planned by each country, including the international bench marking necessary in view of the globalisation of knowledge production. Thus, I am very grateful for the idea, which has been raised here at the conference, of setting up a “Task Force” for the promotion of successful Cross-border Education at eye-level. This “Task Force” ought to indeed consist of experts of Higher Education as well as development co-operation from both North and South. Moreover, it should interpret its role as a lobby group and thus also include policy makers at different levels. I should like to invite you all to contribute to establishing this “Task Force” and thus help to promote our common objective of Cross-border Education.

I am convinced that generally we are on the right way as has been demonstrated by the many best practices presented here. I can assure you that the German Academic Exchange Service will certainly continue its support for your fruitful co-operation projects.

Thank you very much for attending the conference and have a safe trip back home.